



Temple University
Collaborative
On Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities



Yoga & Your Health

Research has shown that:

Doing yoga reduces depression and anxiety in people who have been diagnosed with psychiatric disabilities. Further, yoga was found to decrease symptoms for people diagnosed with schizophrenia. People who did yoga saw improvements in their psychological (mental) well-being ⁽⁵⁾, physical health ⁽²⁾, ability to recognize their emotions ⁽¹⁾, mental illness ^(1,2,6), quality of life ^(2,6) and their ability to function in social and work situations ^(1,2).

How to get started:

First, explore what kind of yoga you enjoy the most. There are countless styles of yoga, from Vinyasa yoga (which is fast-paced and involves a lot of movements) to Iyengar yoga (which takes time to focus on aligning the body into specific shapes). Each yoga studio will typically have their own style of yoga – for example, a Bikram yoga studio will teach scripted classes in a very hot environment. The only way to know what kind you like is to try a variety of classes! Even within a studio, each yoga teacher will have their own manner of teaching, so try at least 3 different classes with different teachers before deciding what is best for you.

Wear comfortable clothes that you can move and sweat in. A t-shirt or tank top and sweatpants are usually fine. Check with the studio before you go to see if you will need to bring your own mat or if mats are provided. Many stores with a pharmacy, such as Walgreens, Rite-Aid, and Target sell yoga mats for under \$20 if you would like to buy your own.

Once you find a type of yoga that you like, consider making time to go to the same class regularly each week. Doing this can help you to build a relationship with the teacher and the other people in the class. Knowing people are expecting you can encourage you to stick with it!

After you've practiced for a month or two, you may feel comfortable doing yoga on your own, in addition to or instead of taking classes. You can use a rolled-up towel as a yoga strap. A piece of scrap wood, books, and boxes can substitute for yoga blocks (just be careful that they are sturdy enough for your pose). Practicing on your own can feel empowering and help you to focus on your favorite poses and personal fitness goals.

Keep in mind: most people who practice at yoga studios have a lot of experience already. It is okay if you aren't sure what you are doing at first! The goal of yoga is for you to practice at your own level and pace, so even if that looks different from other people in the room, you can still get the benefits of yoga.



www.tucollaborative.org

Ways to do yoga in your community:

In addition to studios which only offer yoga, most gyms and fitness centers also offer yoga classes free to anyone with a membership. Often, you can get a discount on your gym membership through your health insurance. Most YMCAs also offer sliding-scale memberships based on income. Other ways to find affordable yoga:

- Many studios offer work-exchange programs, where you can get free classes in trade for helping around the studio and signing students into classes. An added benefit of work exchange programs is that you get to meet a lot of people at the studio! Check with the studio to see how much time you would have to commit to work.
- Ask if a studio offers any “community,” donation-based, or lower-cost classes. These classes are usually \$10 or less.
- Check at the library, rec center, and other community centers for classes offered in other places – for example, on the pier, in the park, on the beach, etc. These community classes are often free! Keep in mind that most outdoor classes will only be available in spring, summer, and early fall when the weather is most appropriate, and most of these classes require you to bring your own mat.
- If you meet a yoga teacher whose class you like, ask them to recommend other chances to practice!

Sources:

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